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BRIDGING THE GAP: YORK FESTIVAL OF IDEAS 2026

The 2026 York Festival of Ideas has once again proven its significance as a beacon of public engagement and academic impact. Built on the core belief that ideas can transform lives, and thanks to our increasing roster of donors, including HEIF, this year's festival theme, 'Place and Space,' provided a vital, free, and relatable channel for our research to reach communities far beyond the campus.

In an era of declining public trust, the Festival acts as a powerful bridge. By creating a blended programme of big names like Dame Kelly Holmes, Clive Myrie, Sally Wainwright, and focusing on the complex, critical issues shaping our world - from economic growth and regional prosperity in the North to whether democratic accountability can survive an era of global technology dominance, we are demonstrating the University's relevance. Our dedicated focus days are the spine of our programme, convening our own and other academic experts, policymakers, journalists, sponsor organisations as thought leaders, and the public, to collaboratively define, discuss and debate the complexity of the challenges of our era.

This year, we shattered geographic and social barriers, most notably through our online event with Festival Patron Sir Michael Morpurgo. With nearly 50,000 children participating from across the UK, we brought world-class inspiration directly into school assembly halls, particularly in remote and underserved areas.



Photograph credit: Ian Martindale/York Festival of Ideas

As the *Community University of the Year*, our commitment to public **good** remains our foundation - the festival demonstrates our public **value**. Whether through archaeological workshops in community venues or a citizens assembly debating the future

of York's economic growth opportunities, we are not just sharing knowledge - we are building relationships. The York Festival of Ideas proves that when universities open their doors, we contribute to a more informed, connected, and engaged society.

RESEARCH BUILT FOR REAL-WORLD IMPACT: INSIDE THREE NEW BORN IN BRADFORD PROJECTS

We are delighted to feature three of the six new research projects recently funded by the Born in Bradford (BiB) Centre for Social Change at York. Developed in collaboration with partners across Bradford, these initiatives build upon BiB's unique datasets to generate evidence that can drive real policy change and improve health, wellbeing, and social outcomes.

These newly funded projects are designed to tackle pressing challenges facing young people and local communities and reflect the Centre's growing momentum and its ongoing commitment to producing research that is both rooted in Bradford and built for tangible, real-world impact.

Below, we take a closer look at three of these exciting new projects and the vital work they are doing.

Predicting indoor environmental health risks to support equitable retrofit policy in the UK

Dr Lia Chatzidiakou

Research conducted in Bradford aims to examine how energy-efficiency upgrades in British housing might influence indoor health risks as the climate changes.

Homes in the UK are responsible for a significant amount of the country's greenhouse gas emissions, so improving the energy efficiency of homes is an important part of tackling climate change. At the same time, the UK is experiencing warmer temperatures, more extreme weather, and changing rainfall patterns. These changes can increase problems such as damp, mould, poor indoor air quality, and overheating in homes.

Poor housing conditions already contribute to physical and mental health problems, particularly for people living in

low-income households and other disadvantaged communities. Improving homes has the potential to improve health and reduce pressure on the NHS. However, if energy-efficiency improvements are not designed for future climate conditions, they could unintentionally increase risks such as mould growth, indoor air pollution, and overheating.

This project will use information already collected from 700 homes in Bradford through existing research programmes (**INGENIOUS** and **HEALTHY HOMES**) and develop tools to predict indoor health risks—such as mould, air pollution, and heat stress—under various future climate and housing scenarios.

Ultimately, these predictive tools will enable policymakers, housing



providers, and communities to identify at-risk properties and make informed decisions that safeguard public health, reduce inequalities, and ensure housing improvements remain effective as the climate changes.

Investigating the social gradient of adolescent loneliness in the Born in Bradford Age of Wonder Cohort

Dr James Myers, Research Associate, Department of Health Sciences

Loneliness amongst adolescents is a global concern, growing in conjunction with technology use and exacerbated by the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. We know that adolescent loneliness can lead to worse mental health in young adults, as well as poorer physical health, and higher mortality into adulthood. Crucially, loneliness is not distributed equally: worse outcomes are starkly linked to lower familial socioeconomic status. This association is known as the 'social gradient' of loneliness. What is less well known, especially among diverse populations, is which factors might protect against or even worsen this relationship.

Funded by an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) grant

through the **Born in Bradford (BiB) Centre for Social Change** at York, our project seeks to answer that question through direct co-production with those with lived experience. Partnering with BiB, we have already conducted a co-production workshop with *The Future Starts With Us*, a Bradford-based group of young adults. This workshop gave us invaluable insights into what loneliness means to them, and the specific factors – such as meeting in person vs online, spending quality time with family, and having access to spaces to facilitate these behaviours – that contribute to it.

These lived experiences, alongside a literature review, will feed directly into our data analysis using the

ongoing **BiB Age of Wonder cohort** study. First, we will assess whether loneliness is measured reliably across Bradford's diverse population. Secondly, we will map the relationship between loneliness and socioeconomic status, accounting for protective and risk factors that modify this relationship. We will then co-interpret our results with young people to ensure our findings are grounded in their lived reality.

Ultimately, this work aims to pave the way for targeted interventions to reduce youth loneliness. The study is expected to complete by March 2027, and we look forward to sharing our findings with the network.

Beats and Belonging in Bradford, Leeds and York: DJing for Youth Wellbeing and Inclusion

Having arrived at the University of York (UoY) in 2021 as a Lecturer (now Senior Lecturer) in Music Education, **Dr Pete Dale** has been working tirelessly to embed Disc Jockeying (DJing) workshops into mainstream secondary schools in York and Leeds in order to test their impact on student wellbeing, cultural identity and academic attainment. Participant schools have included Leeds West Academy, Cockburn School (Leeds), Springwell Leeds Academy, Tadcaster Grammar School, York High School, Vale of York Academy, Fulford School and more.

Support for these schools has included: in-service training for groups of teachers in both Leeds and York, showing them how

teaching and learning in music can benefit from DJ decks; dozens of exemplar lessons delivered in a range of schools with whole classes of learners who are entirely new to DJing; direct support for small groups of learners to support these individuals with DJing performances for GCSE Music; and bespoke support for teachers in understanding how to assess a DJ performance according to the GCSE specifications (most of which now offer descriptions of DJ skills although, regrettably, very few learners and teachers are as yet taking up this option – hence Pete's intervention).

In 2026, **Born in Bradford Centre for Social Change** is providing £20k of funding for Pete with his

new co-investigator **Dr Caroline Waddington-Jones** (also a Lecturer in Music Education at UoY) to support their "Beats and Belonging in Bradford" project. This project extends the work in Leeds and York with a stronger wellbeing/identity-focused approach: working with three schools and three DJ educators as well as an inner-city youth centre in Bradford, a mixture of questionnaire surveys, interviews, focus groups and workshop observations will enable a clearer picture of what benefits to young people can arise from the opportunity to 'mix tunes' as a DJ. The data collection will take place across late 2026 and early 2027 with a policy brief, website and launch event in Bradford around Easter 2027.